1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

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TABLE 2. KASKA POPULATION

Tribe	1875	1887	1914	1917	1924	1928[8]	1929	1934	1944[12]
Dease Lake	105[6]	70[7]	70	70	64	150	64	137[10]	74
Upper Liard and Frances Lake			79	84	82	80	80	95	42[13]
Nelson River			89	106	123		141[9]	91[11]	59
Total			238	260	269		285	323	175

about 200.[14] Mooney estimated 500 for the aboriginal population of the total Kaska area.[15] Although it cannot be denied that Kaska population has suffered some decline since 1840, the magnitude of this seems exaggerated. We doubt that the aboriginal population exceeded 300.

About 50 per cent of the Kaska are adults over sixteen years of age (Table 3). Adult males slightly exceed adult females, the ratio being 1:.725. Among children, girls are more numerous than boys by a ratio of 1:1.175. During the period from June 1944 to July 1945 we noted eleven births which suggests a birth rate of at least 55 per 1000 population. Of these births five, or about 45 per cent, occurred in spring. Seven were female and four male. The

[162] [163]

TABLE 3. AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION—MARCH 31, 1944

Tribe	Men	Women	Children Under 16 Boys	Children Under 16 Girls	Total
Dease River	20	14	16	24	74
Upper Liard	14	9	8	11	42
Nelson River	17	14	16	12	59
Total	51	37	40	47	175

[6] French and Ware, *British Columbia Posts; No. 7, McDame's Creek Post* (1923–24), 395.

[7] Dawson, *Report of an Exploration in the Yukon District* (1887–1888), 200. This reference, like the preceding, is to Indians trading at McDame Post and no tribal specifications are given.

[8] Allard, *Notes on the Kaska and Upper Liard Indians* (1928), 24. The author confesses that his estimate of 150 people trading at McDame Creek probably includes Sekani and Nelson Indians.

[9] The constantly rising population of the Nelson Indians seems to point to a confusion of Nelson and adjacent Sekani people like the Tsetsa-na.

[10] This figure probably includes forty odd Indians classified as "Grahame Nomads" in earlier reports, and this term probably refers to the Tsetsa-na.

[11] The reference is to "Nomadic McDame and Liard District."

[12] Canada, *Stikine Indian Agency Census* (1944).

[13] Includes only three Frances Lake Indians.

[14] This figure is based on the 175 people trading into Lower Post and listed in the government's census of 1944 plus an estimated thirty Frances Lake Indians for whom no census data could be obtained. The figure does not include the Espato-tena.

[15] Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (1939), 141.

1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

163 average age of the mother at first conception can be estimated to be about sixteen, the range being reported from thirteen to nineteen. The father is generally about five years older than the mother. Considering the existing families with more than one child, we found that families had from two to six living and one or two deceased children. It must be realized, however, that these are not yet completed families and will produce further children. No difference in fertility could be noticed between women married to white men or Indians.

164 The Kaska are not a healthy people. The most common illnesses noted during the period of field work were tuberculosis, poor teeth, influenza, dysentery, colds, skin diseases, such as impetigo, and red eyes. A few cases of gonorrhea were treated by the army physicians. No undue frequency of accidents was noted. The only serious one during the fall of 1945 in the Upper Laird tribe was the case of an elderly man who fell while intoxicated and sprained his back.

Children tend to have particularly bad teeth. Two children, aged three, had lost the two upper middle incisors and several children showed extremely bad tooth decay. Influenza epidemics occur occasionally and in the fall of 1944 a dysentery epidemic spread from the town of Lower Post up and down the Liard River. At Smith River five Nelson Indian children were reported to have lost their lives from this disease and an upper Liard Indian woman and child also died. Sporadic outbreaks of dysentery continued during the

165 the summer of 1945. Eleven deaths occurred in the period from September 1944 through August 1945. This indicates a death rate of at least 55 per 1000, equalling the birth rate. Of these deaths seven were of children, one a newborn baby.

HISTORY

173 According to the Old Man, an Upper Liard informant, the Kaska Indians of that region believe themselves to be descendants from the Tlingit through the Ross River (Pelly) Indians. The progenitors of the present day Liard River Kaska originally moved south to explore the Upper Liard country and remained there. It seems worthwhile to consider this bit of traditional history. Pelly and Ross Rivers mark the headwaters of the great Yukon drainage system and their confluence represents a point which would be relatively easy to reach by moving up the waterways from Bering Sea. From the head of the Pelly River, migrants could continue toward the interior by crossing the Pelly River-Frances Lake divide, thus striking the Liard River drainage system. Once across this barrier the vast stretch of intermontane basin lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Cordillera would lie open. If such a theory of migration into the intermontane basin is to be sustained, the cultures of the tribes extending from the Yukon River would have to show a reasonable

[171] degree of similarity. Although evidence is still lacking for the groups north of Frances Lake (for example, the Pelly River Indians), similarity is found between the Kaska (but excluding the Nelson River tribe), Tahltan, and Carrier. Masks, potlatching, line dancing instead of circle dancing, and dual organizations are some of the traits common to Alaskan and the Athapaskan tribes of west-central British Columbia but lacking among the more easterly Slave and Sekani groups.

The above migration theory would deny the derivation of the diagnostic traits from the Northwest Coast, although the subsequent development of such traits may have been